

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BONN 21303 241225Z
ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
-----010454 241227Z /10

R 241145Z DEC 77 ZFF-6
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4283

S E C R E T BONN 21303

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FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY VEST FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3
TAGS: PINT, IT, GW
SUBJECT: FRG VIEWS ON THE SITUATION IN ITALY

REF: A. STATE 303347, B. BONN 19828, C. BONN 19836

1. FRG OFFICIALS WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN IN RECENT MONTHS ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE STATE OF ITALIAN POLITICS. I HAVE NO RECENT INFORMATION, HOWEVER, ON WHICH TO BASE A JUDGMENT AS TO WHETHER CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT AND HIS TOP ADVISORS ALSO CONSIDER IT LIKELY THAT THE PCI WILL ACQUIRE A GREATER ROLE IN GOVERNMENT AS EARLY AS JANUARY (REF. A).

2. I TALKED WITH RUHFUS IN THE CHANCELLERY SHORTLY AFTER THE SCHMIDT-ANDREOTTI MEETING IN VERONA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MONTH, AND GATHERED THAT IT HAD GONE EXTREMELY WELL. THE GERMANS HAD BEEN MOST IMPRESSED WITH ANDREOTTI'S ABILITY TO STAY AFLOAT SO LONG, GIVEN THE HIGHLY COMPLICATED ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN ITALY. (RUHFUS ALSO SAID THERE HAD BEEN AN INTEREST-ING EXCHANGE OF VIEWS BETWEEN SCHMIDT AND ANDREOTTI ON TERRORISM, FROM WHICH THE GERMANS GOT THE IMPRESSION

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THAT THEIR PROBLEMS WERE ALMOST MINOR COMPARED WITH THE ITALIAN SITUATION.)

3. WHEN I DISCUSSED EUROCOMMUNISM ISSUES WITH WILLY BRANDT ON NOVEMBER 29 (REF. B), HE TOOK A SOMEWHAT RELAXED VIEW ABOUT THE PCI, CONTRASTING IT WITH THE MORE MONOLITHIC--AND HENCE, IN HIS VIEW, POSSIBLY MORE

DANGEROUS--PCF. BRANDT ALSO TOLD ME THAT THE SPD WILL STEP UP ITS CONTACTS WITH ITALIAN SOCIALISTS BY SENDING A MORE ENERGETIC MAN TO THE OFFICE OF THE FRIEDRICH EBERT FOUNDATION IN ROME (REF. C).

4. IN RECENT DAYS, THE FRG PRESS HAS PAID GROWING ATTENTION TO THE SITUATION IN ITALY. MAJOR THEMES HAVE BEEN BERLINGUER'S DEMAND FOR A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY, A REPORTED SOFTENING OF RESISTANCE IN SOME DC QUARTERS TO GIVING THE PCI A GREATER VOICE, AND THE CONTINUING ECONOMIC MALAISE. A FEW COMMENTARIES, MOST RECENTLY IN THE INDEPENDENT GENERAL ANZEIGER OF DECEMBER 22, ARGUE THAT THE ITALIAN SITUATION HAS DETERIORATED TO THE POINT THAT ADDITIONAL CREDITS ALONE WILL NOT HELP. SOME OF THESE REPORTS PROBABLY REFLECT OFFICIAL FRG VIEWS AND BACKGROUNDING. ACCORDINGLY, UNLESS THE DEPARTMENT HAS SPECIAL REASONS FOR US TO STAND DOWN, IT WOULD SEEM WORTHWHILE FOR US TO MAKE DISCREET SOUNDINGS OF TOP-LEVEL FRG VIEWS ON THE ITALIAN SITUATION, SPECIFICALLY ON PROSPECTS FOR THE ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT AND THE PCI. IT IS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT WE COULD OBTAIN MUCH UNTIL AFTER THE HOLIDAYS, POSSIBLY NOT UNTIL THE SECOND WEEK OF JANUARY. PLEASE ADVISE.

5. IT IS AXIOMATIC THAT THE FRG--INDEED, ANY GOVERNMENT
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IN BONN--WOULD VIEW WITH GRAVE CONCERN A DEVELOPMENT WHICH ENHANCED THE PCI'S ROLE IN THE GOVERNMENT OF ITALY. SUCH A DEVELOPMENT WOULD UNDERCUT A MAJOR GOAL OF FRG FOREIGN POLICY OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS: TO ENABLE ITALY, THROUGH A COMBINATION OF POLITICAL SUPPORT AND FINANCIAL CREDITS, TO OVERCOME ITS OWN PROBLEMS WHILE KEEPING THE PCI OUT OF THE CABINET IN ROME. IN ADDITION, SCHMIDT AND THE SPD WOULD HAVE AN EXTRA REASON FOR CONCERN. ANY EUROCOMMUNIST ADVANCE IS LIKELY TO CAUSE A BACKLASH IN THE FRG ELECTORATE, SCARING VOTERS TOWARD THE MORE CONSERVATIVE CDU/CSU AND AWAY FROM THE SPD-FDP. SUCH A BACKLASH COULD BE IMPORTANT IN THE FOUR STATE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR 1978.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TEXT, POLITICAL STABILITY, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, POLITICAL SITUATION, CAT-B
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 24-Dec-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BONN21303
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X3
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: P840084-1531
Format: TEL
From: BONN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771219/aaaaapcz.tel
Line Count: 109
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 7d700efd-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 77 STATE 303347, 77 BONN 19828, 77 BONN 19836
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 132522
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRG VIEWS ON THE SITUATION IN ITALY
TAGS: PINT, PDEV, GE, IT
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/7d700efd-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009